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Review Article

Masuma Hasan

Memories of Jinnah by K.H. Khurshid. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1990. Pages xxviii+91, price not given.

K.H. Khurshid was only twenty years old in 1944 when, during a visit to Srinagar, Mr Jinnah asked him to become his private secretary. That the Quaid selected Khurshid for this coveted responsibility from among more educated, mature and resourceful persons, was a tribute to Khurshid's youthful ardour and passionate commitment to the struggle for Pakistan. In the critical years between 1944 and 1947, Khurshid worked with absolute devotion, dealing with the press which Mr Jinnah kept at arm's length, a galaxy of Indian politicians, and work relating to negotiations with the Congress and the British government. After independence, Mr Jinnah reappointed Khurshid as his private secretary. Khurshid went to Kashmir in October 1947 to meet his family but it is generally believed that he was also entrusted with certain tasks relating to Kashmir's future relations with Pakistan. In Kashmir, Khurshid was thrown into prison and was repatriated in 1949 after the UN administered ceasefire, when the Quaid was already dead.

Memories of Jinnah is an account of Khurshid's reminiscences of the years he spent working closely with Mr Jinnah as his private secretary. It has been edited by Khalid Hasan, Khurshid's brother-in-law, from a journal which Khurshid maintained in London in 1952. That Khurshid wanted to write a larger work on Mr Jinnah is evident from the notes found by his family after his death and his interviews of prominent persons during his stay in London, such as Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana, Qazi Mohammad Isa, Mumtaz Hasan, Chaudhry Mohammad Ali. A record of these conversations forms the second

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part of the book.

For admirers of Mr Jinnah, this book reinforces feelings of loss at the passing away of his political contemporaries and personal friends, without any major effort having been made to record their lives. Loss also at the sense of intellectual inferiority which failed to sponsor a definitive biography of the Quaid by a liberal democrat from his own country, who could have brought the required sensitivity to the task. The book contains an interview with Fatima Jinnah in which she expressed her 'contempt' for Bolitho's biography as being full of factual inaccuracies about her brother's early life. However, her unwillingness to trust any scholar was, in part, responsible for the delay in the publication of a well-researched biography of the Quaid. It was unfortunate also that the effort to collect historical documents and papers was started so late in the life of the country, not initially at the state level but through the work of individual scholars, when much material had been wasted or lost. Surely some time and money could have been diverted, at the start, from the pursuit of opulence and phoney progress, towards developing a national archives.

Khurshid's memories leave his readers thirsting for more. His journal gives a bare outline of events and ends, at point of time, at the Simla Conference. It does not cover the momentous events of 1946 and 1947, except in passing. Notwithstanding the slimness of this volume and Khurshid's total adulation of him, a warmly humane picture of Mr Jinnah emerges, in all his dignity, clarity of purpose, meticulous work habits and immense political vision. As Khurshid writes: 'Politics with Mr Jinnah was a scientific and principled operation involving no trickery. He played an open hand and he played according to the rules.' For the first time, in a serious record of his life, Mr Jinnah's humour and brilliance as a conversationalist glide through the pages.

The narrative gives Khurshid's impressions of leading politicians and princes, and descriptions of their homes and palaces, which a latter day historian could never have captured. Recalling his youthful impression, Khurshid writes, 'I had heard a great deal, mostly hearsay, about the fabulous wealth of Mr Jinnah, his grand style of living and his palatial residence.' He gives the layout of Mr Jinnah's homes in Malabar Hill, Bombay and 10 Aurangzeb Road, Delhi, the latter a

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jewel designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. We get a vivid picture of the small establishment which was the great leader's secretariat, a far cry from the lavish facilities available to the Congress. There are references to Miss Jinnah and the Nawab of Mamdot giving a helping hand when the mail heaped too high for young Khurshid to tackle alone.

Mr Jinnah's eminence as a political leader is universally recognised and does not require reiteration. Khurhid's perception is unique because it comes from one who was in daily contact with him and had won his trust. It conveys the essence of Mr Jinnah's politics at a purely human level — his judgements, expectations, disappointments, moments of anger. It also brings into focus important aspects of his personality, such as his assessment of his political colleagues. Barring a few exceptions, history has vindicated his assessment. That he was kept in the dark by his colleagues about the tribal invasion of Kashmir is a point made several times in this volume.

He had an inner greatness which rejected all pretensions. For example he candidly admitted that he had never passed an academic examination. He told Khurshid that degrees were no test of ability and added 'I am not even a matriculate.' Contrary to the general belief that he was emotionally austere, the warmth of his relationship with Fatima Jinnah is described by Khurshid. Although he was extremely busy during the Simla Conference, he 'always snatched a few minutes from his hectic schedule to write to her. The few letters he wrote in his own hand were almost always written to his sister. He would even inscribe the address himself.' For Khurshid he developed a lasting affection, showing concern for his loneliness as Khurshid was a stranger to Bombay, and advising him on the friends he should make and the books he should read. Fatima Jinnah, whose popular image is also one of extreme reserve, comes out in a generous light. After he returned from captivity in Kashmir, she encouraged and financed Khurshid to read law at Lincoln's Inn and he stayed at Flagstaff House for many years.

This book is a tribute to K.H. Khurshid (one wishes the editor had spelt out the initials of his name in the text). In the sensitive reader's mind it will raise many questions of public morality in Pakistan's political culture. Khurshid was political to the core. He was one of the founders of the Muslim Students' Federation in Srinagar

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and was an ardent supporter of the Muslim League. Later in life, he founded the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation League which is still represented in the Azad Kashmir legislature. But he was also one of the fast dying breed of honest and principled politicians. Like a few others who committed their lives to the cause of democracy in Pakistan, Khurshid never 'made it' in the new cut-throat culture of politics. And in his life was the added dimension of the liberation of his beloved Kashmir. The brief span of five years when he became president of Azad Kashmir at Ayub Khan's request is anomalous with respect to his career as Ayub Khan was not known for his love for democracy. Khurshid may have seized the opportunity to serve the people of Kashmir but he resigned from the presidentship because he could not bear to be pushed around by the bureaucrats in Islamabad. Following differences of opinion with the government over the events leading to the Pakistan- India war in 1965, he was imprisoned in Dalai Camp for almost one year.

In a touching portrayal of life with Khurshid, his wife Sorraya, gives many instances of his utter honesty as a public figure. She recalls that he hardly made use of the privileges available to him as president, and after he had resigned from the presidentship actually returned to the government, at the same price, a plot of land earlier allotted to him. He was a family man and loved the simple things of life. He died in 1988 in a fatal road accident while travelling in a public bus. Will we, at any point of time, cherish and bring to power political persons with Khurshid's simple virtues, devotion to principles and rejection of grab and greed?

For Khalid Hasan and Sorraya Khurshid, this work was a labour of love and they have both written with clarity and sincerity. Although the book deserved a more sophisticated get up, a word of appreciation is due to Oxford University Press.

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